

Friendship

But friendship seems to consist more in loving than in being loved. A sign of this is the enjoyment a mother finds in loving. For sometimes she gives her child away to be brought up, and loves him as long as she knows about him; but she does not seek the child's love, if she cannot both [love and be loved]. She would seem to be satisfied if she sees the child doing well, and she loves the child even if ignorance prevents him from returning to her what is due to a mother. (*Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 128)

This digression on giving and receiving in friendship highlights several anomalies in Aristotle's thought. Earlier he claims that love is a feeling, while friendship is a state. In Christian terms, love is also a state, in that it involves consistently choosing a set of actions. He defines friendship here in terms of unequals, parent and child, although elsewhere he carefully notes that equality of the partners – or at least the capability of growing into it – is essential to friendship. Finally, this emphasis on the primacy of loving and giving strikes a very Christian chord in its terminology, although Aristotle's later claim that friends should not share their burdens in times of distress indicates a more stoic definition of love. Love, according to Aristotle is the virtue of friendship, yet friendship itself is also a virtue (or involves virtue). The other cardinal virtues (generosity, wisdom, courage and temperance) develop mutually as friends encourage the best in each other and eventually become each other's goods. This fits with the Christian metaphor of the moral life as a journey towards transformation. Our friends can be God's instruments by helping us live into our baptismal vows. They do this both through 'virtuing' in regards to us and by refraining from 'vicing'. True friends won't ask us to perform a base action on their behalf. Friendship is the foundation of virtue, but its peculiar manifestation is mature love. Friendship may begin in the passion of the lover for the beloved, but only endures if the partners have similar characters to begin with and settle into the habits of true friendship.

Ideally, the relationship between parent and child passes through all three types of friendship: pleasure, utility and intrinsic. Children initially depend on parents for their very lives. Parents stand in the position of gods (actually contrary to friendship), so are useful to them. As they grow, children develop a friendship of pleasure with their parents. Parents love their children, showering them with gifts, praise and tokens of affection, which pleases children. When they reach adulthood, perhaps at the time they themselves become parents, they discover a friendship that constitutes reciprocal goodwill. They love each other for their own sakes and wish and work for each others' good. Since living together and being on familiar terms is essential, parents who must give their children up to others to raise can never achieve this final phase of mutuality. They love their children, but their children cannot rightly love them. The requirement for close and sustained contact also limits the number of friends one can have at any given time. Aristotle hints in this mother and child analogy at the sacrificial nature of love epitomized by Christ.

A Father's Story is profoundly disturbing, since much of it reads like a pastoral. Its narrative form is essentially Luke Ripley's recollections, so we learn about the characters of his friends through their effects on his life. Luke describes his love for his daughter as profoundly other. She and her friends move about like birds in their new womanhood. Because of the divorce he sees her only during summers, so in a sense she's a stranger in her own home. Luke practices hospitality to strangers - lemonade, Coke and cookies with his daughter and her friends; a weekly supper with his priest. He's a model of stability, going to mass daily to pray for family and friends, and tithing to a service for the homeless. When married, he followed the church's difficult teaching on birth control. After his wife left him, he committed adultery twice but immediately confessed. He's a wise, generous, temperate and courageous man. The test of his justice comes when he allows another's child to die in order to save his own. Jennifer, although she never asks her father to conceal the accident, accepts his act of mercy. Luke argues with God, claiming that he would have held his sons accountable for the accident, but never his daughter. We never learn his sons' names. Only his wife (Gloria), his daughter (Jennifer), her friends (Liz and Betsy), his priest (Father Paul), and the boy who died (Patrick) have names. In Luke's conversation with God he never quite admits that all of God's sons are his, as well.

Friendship

Anthropology of Friendship & Virtue

Aristotle asserts that the moral life requires friendships & that the essence of those relationships includes an equality of virtue between the friends, close & sustained contact – essentially living together – and opening the heart & mind to the friend. The intensity of the relationship necessitates that one have only a few friends at a time. The interplay between friendship & ethical development indicates that one's earliest friends exercise a significant impact on subsequent virtue.

Bonnie: He makes the claim that human is to dwell with others, and to fulfill one's nature brings about happiness....The act of friendship in Aristotle's view is for the final end of mutual enjoyment of the friends. For Christian's, however, the end of friendship is to participate in this *caritas*, which resides in God.

Mathieu: How can a society be held together by something which is impossible to be achieved in a wide scale? Social relations which can hold a society should obey to a pattern of mutuality which goes beyond closed and small circles to reach and include the whole political community. If a person cannot become the friend of the whole political community he or she belongs to, therefore the pattern of mutuality holding society together may not be described in the terms used by Aristotle.

Rafi: Each of us brings different gifts to the community. This is not to be understood as making some better than others, since even if one is experienced, educated and/or wise, "I must see that I cannot live well without this other's guidance. So it is that I need her friendship for happiness, and for virtue. And in needing her I need something essentially different from myself." (H/P 51)

1. Is Aristotle correct to insist on friendship or can we conceive of a moral individual who exists outside of social relationships for extended periods? How would we determine if that the individual was virtuous or vicious? Why would it matter?
2. If Aristotle is correct, how do we account for the desert monastics, solitaries & hermits in the Christian (and other) traditions?
3. If Aristotle is correct, what are the implications for single parents? How does the RCC's teaching on divorce & re-marriage address Aristotle's concerns *vis a vis* the moral life? How does Aristotle's belief affect the way we view relationships among gay & lesbian people?

Friendship & Suffering

Aristotle asserts that because it's better to give than to receive, a friend should not share his misfortunes, but only his joys & successes. During periods of suffering, the friend should withdraw at least temporarily from the relationship. Hauerwas & Pinches contrast this approach with the Christian doctrine of suffering with the other (compassion). Aristotle actually never admonishes against compassion, he only claims that the suffering person should not expect or demand compassion from friends as it may get in the way of working for the good of the other. He also does not claim that the suffering person should merely endure silently, just that they should not share their suffering with their friends.

Patrick: Christ asks his followers to be good friends in times of prosperity and times of suffering. He teaches us that friends share the good by being a certain way, the beatitudes (for example) and we share the good when we live through suffering and not run away from it, 'those who will be my followers will take up my cross...'. Christ advocates a life of sacrificial loving in one's relationships.

Zachary: Aristotle asserts that since friends want what is best for the other, they will not be likely to share their suffering, but would be eager to share their joy. H & P point out that “Christians must be those who are capable of sharing their suffering with others.” For Christians, suffering is intimately connected with redemption, virtue and friendship.

Anne: Acquiring virtues (love, courage, constancy, patience, hope, friendship) is a part of the journey, because the virtues are what ultimately will transform us into the exact person God is calling us to be. The virtues will lead us to freedom. But we can't go it alone. It isn't possible. Friendship and community are required if we are to be transformed. And because we are transformed not only in our joy but also in our pain, friends belong with us in the good times and in the scary times.

1. Are these views mutually exclusive? Why or why not?
2. Are there times when a friend should not share their misfortunes or suffering with a friend? If so, whom should they share with?
3. Is it appropriate to intervene when a friend is obviously suffering but has chosen to withdraw? If so, how can we still honor the friend's privacy?

Friendship Among Parents & Children

Aristotle views the relationship among parents & children as one of friendship. In his context, a man & woman would have recognized their societal obligation to marry, would have chosen each other as partners for the mutual benefit of their families & would produce children. They would raise their children in accordance with their own virtues. Aristotle's reference to the 'boy' as the beloved of the lover implies that he does not find erotic love (which is founded on pleasure) essential in a marriage, but he does believe friendship to be essential. Because children imitate their parents, whatever virtues & vices the parents have will become the foundational ethics for their children. True friendship is among equals in virtue & state, which seems to eliminate the idea of friendship of parents & children, unless we view it over the long term, with the idea that children will grow into an equality at least of virtue with their parents.

James: “Convenient friendships” combine both utility and pleasure as the object desired in the relationship. Popular in today's busy, highly mobile and individualistic society, the “pre-nuptial agreement” epitomizes the absurdity of legal protection from a convenient and “trusted friend,” to whom one promises to be faithful for the rest of one's life. How poorly we understand the depths to which Christian marital friendship calls us!

Maximos: “The heart has its reasons” claimed the late Duchess of Windsor, thereby invoking the canons of Romantic sentimentalism to justify her affair with the then Prince of Wales. It is difficult to imagine a world-view more fundamentally at odds with the firm logic of Aristotle, for whom even the most intimate human relationships must ultimately be based—if they are to be honored—on principle rather than on feeling. True friendship is based on reciprocity of virtue. “Complete friendship is the friendship of good people similar in virtue” (1156b7).

Meg: Ideally, the relationship between parent and child passes through all three types of friendship: pleasure, utility and intrinsic.

1. Are there times when parents should not be friends of their children? Are there times when children should not be friends of their parents? What is the effect on children if the 2 parents are not friends of each other?
2. What is the effect on children if the 2 parents are unequal in virtue?
3. What is the effect on children if the friendship of their 2 parents is based on utility or pleasure rather than intrinsic virtue?

Aquinas on Virtue

There are also certain mortal sins which man can nowise avoid without grace, those, namely, which are directly opposed to the theological virtues, which are in us through the gift of grace. (*Summa Theologiae*, First Part of the Second Part, Question 63, Article 2, Reply to Objection 2)

In his answer to this question Aquinas distinguishes between a variety of concepts: virtue and grace, infused virtue and acquired virtue, sin and mortal sin. He argues that the cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, justice and courage – found not only in Aristotle, but also in the Hebrew Scriptures (Wisdom 8:7) – can be acquired solely through human effort. Just as evil acts create vicious habits, good acts create virtuous habits. Nevertheless, it's possible for humans who have habituated the cardinal virtues to sin through the improper use of their wills. A single evil action doesn't destroy habituated virtue, however. The sin might be mortal, but the person who has acquired virtue will still mostly avoid vice. Aquinas quotes Augustine on grace (that "which God works in us without us") both to define infused virtues and to distinguish them from the habituated virtues. In Aquinas' view, the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity are infused, by God's grace. In fact, without the infusion of the theological virtues, humans cannot avoid certain mortal sins, no matter how well they have habituated the cardinal virtues. And, because we only receive these virtues by grace, there's an unbreakable connection among grace, faith, hope and charity.

Aquinas follows Aristotle in determining that the cardinal virtues are interrelated. Although we may be at different stages of habituating one or the other, ultimately we cannot be virtuous without all four. He values prudence above temperance, justice and courage. In his view, without prudence – the ability to discern the appropriate action for our circumstances – we cannot exercise temperance, justice or courage. So in effect, we cannot habituate temperance, justice or courage without having already habituated prudence. Aquinas uses the same hierarchy when he speaks of the theological virtues. Charity is the utmost virtue, and without it we cannot have faith or hope. He agrees with St. Paul that we can do the right thing for the wrong reason, but such acts are not truly virtuous. Without charity we have nothing.

Rose is the story of a woman lacking prudence. She's married to a man who has neither the emotional capacity to parent nor the intellectual capacity to financially support a family. Their imprudent marriage is exacerbated by the births of three children in rapid succession. Although nominally Catholic, Rose and Jim don't practice community. They don't know their neighbors. Their leisure is spent at home watching television or else at a bar, talking past each other. Neither has close friends and neither one is a friend to the other. Rose affiliates with her children and distances from her husband, as do many young mothers living in households where the man is breadwinner and the woman is housekeeper. This family lives in the same house as strangers. Rose has to tell Jim she needs a washer. Jim is oblivious, moving wet laundry from place to place, as if it's not an integral part of his life. He views his children in the same way. Their noise and presence is an impediment. Because of Jim's physical size, his traditional ideology, and the needs of her three babies, Rose feels herself dependent on him. The stage is set for domestic violence. Jim's physical abuse of the children is a logical extension of his psychological abuse of Rose. When the physical abuse begins, Rose recognizes it as inappropriate, unjust and intemperate. As it escalates, she intercepts the violence rather than acting decisively to stop it or asking for help. She fails to discern the eventual outcome on the final night, mesmerizing herself instead through dishwashing. Her great courage in rescuing her children from death contrasts with her determination to destroy the man who tried to destroy the evidence and witness of his abuse – his own children. Rose acquires prudence too late.

Rose

1. Rose's Character

Aquinas & Aristotle believe that we can be at varying levels of development in the separate virtues but that they are interconnected, so that to be truly virtuous requires that we have them all.

How does the narrator feel about Rose's virtues & vices? What details tell us where his sympathies lie? What's the purpose of the introductory material that doesn't specifically pertain to Rose's story?

How does Rose perceive herself? What would she identify as her own virtues & vices? What factors make her opinion more or less reliable than the narrator's?

2. The Nature of Virtue

Aquinas distinguishes between acquired & infused virtues. The cardinal virtues of temperance, justice, courage & prudence can be acquired. The theological virtues of faith, hope & charity can only be infused in us by God's grace.

Can we identify any developments in Rose's character that reflect a habituation of virtue or vice? What evidence is there of infused virtue in Rose?

How do we explain her intuition regarding her children throughout the story, but especially in returning for her daughters at the end? How do we account for her quiet courage in daily life as well as the creative & heroic act of rescuing her daughters from the fire?

3. The Contributions of Religion & Society

Theologian Elizabeth Johnson, in her book *Truly Our Sister*, claims that women throughout history & in all cultures perceive unnecessary suffering as an evil requiring our active resistance.

What role do religious & societal structures play in the individual's acquisition of virtue or vice? What specific instances in Rose's case contributed to or detracted from her growth in virtue?

Do men & women perceive virtue & vice differently? Should we hold the victim responsible for resisting evil & what are the consequences of each approach?

Charity

For Thomas, the success of human practice does not depend only on its orientation to the final end, but also on *what* love does in the sphere of proximate ends of action. (*The Ethics of Aquinas*, Schockenhoff, p. 251)

Aquinas builds on Aristotle's view of friendship – as a mutual, reciprocal benevolence in a relationship of equality – for his description of the infused theological virtue of charity. Founded in love of God, for God's self, charity is imparted to humans through grace, in creation, for the purpose of lifting us to a position of equality in our friendship with God. Because God desires this friendship with all of humanity, we must love all those we encounter on our life's pilgrimage for God's sake. Thus, charity always manifests itself in concrete actions, on earth, for our neighbors. Charity cannot act on its own, but only in and through the moral virtues, such as temperance, justice, courage and prudence. Aquinas' *caritas* is neither an abstraction nor a spiritualized universal beneficence. Without love for our neighbor, we have no actual love for God. Without charity, our acquired moral virtues are imperfect at best, false – and therefore vices – at worst. Charity is the form of the virtues. It releases our good habits to work for the ultimate good, despite our will's natural tendency towards disorder, perversion or identification of some other end as our true *telos*.

Charity is incompatible with sin, to the extent that a single mortal sin eliminates charity. Since venial sins often predispose us to mortal sin, any sin threatens charity. Therefore, fraternal correction becomes an act of charity. While charity obliges us to love our enemies, we cannot love the harm they cause us. Rather, we can only assist them in emergencies, as fellows sharing in the same beatitude. Sin, for Aquinas, constitutes self-deception about the true good. Since the fruits of charity include joy, peace, mercy, almsgiving, beneficence and wisdom, such a lack of proper knowledge conflicts with our ability to respond to God's grace. Unlike Augustine, who distills the relationship of grace to works in his phrase "love and do as you will", Aquinas insists on an integral connection between *caritas* – infused in us by grace – and our actions. He lists as vices against charity hatred, boredom, envy, discord, contentiousness, schism, war, quarrel, riotousness and bothersomeness. The first three fall into the category of internal states, whereas the remainder are their related actions – the external manifestations of one or more of those conditions.

In the story *The Fat Girl*, Dubus presents several characters who perform essentially the same action: fraternal correction. Charity motivates only one. Louise's metabolism causes her to gain weight easily. Because she can't change her body chemistry, she falls into the vice of eating the worst kinds of food in response to her mother's fraternal corrections around diet. Unlike her father, who exhibits unreserved love for Louise, her mother is hyper-vigilant, smoking to maintain weight. As the opening scene reveals, dietary concern is directed towards the proximate end of attractiveness to men, not health. Publicly, Louise eats sparingly, but she binges privately on sweets. She has no true friends until she meets Carrie at college. Carrie suffers from sadness at the lack of love in her family, mirroring Louise's despair that only her father truly loves her. Carrie and Louise choose each other as friends. Carrie responds to Louise's initial act of benevolence in consoling her by asking Louise to eat her sweets openly. They begin a mutual course of wishing the other's good. When Carrie falls in love, she wants Louise to experience love. She plans a diet and exercise regimen, cooks for Louise and keeps her company, encouraging her weight loss through habits of temperance. Louise's new self-esteem and physical transformation alter her family's perceptions from pity to apparent love. Louise marries a man who knows her only as a thin, stylish woman. They discover that he loves her image rather than her nature. Richard's attempts to help Louise lose weight after their son is born reveal fraternal correction from anger rather than compassion born of charity that motivated Carrie.

The Fat Girl

1. Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.

Aristotle believes that the moral life is impossible without friendship. Aquinas believes that without charity, we lack true virtue. Charity works through the moral virtues to express the love of God in concrete actions of love towards the other. Without love of the other, there can be no love of God.

What characteristics do the friends that Louise chooses – Joan, Marjorie & Carrie – share in common? What distinguishes Carrie as a true friend to Louise? Louise is invisible during high school & college, even while losing weight. How do we understand & experience God’s love for us short of the mediation of human love?

How do the various characters in the story express their love for Louise? How does Louise express her love in return? Where is charity found?

2. Vicing a Virtue

Aquinas distinguishes between acquired & infused virtues. The cardinal virtues of temperance, justice, courage & prudence can be acquired. Charity perfects those virtues by directing them towards their proper end.

What clues indicate the nature of Louise’s temperance around food? In high school Louise eats secretly. Her friends overeat as well, drinking milkshakes together, but never gain weight. In college Louise loses weight despite persistent hunger & constant irascibility. How can we assess temperance in an individual?

Louise & her mother both spend a considerable amount of time cooking hearty meals for their husbands, while scarcely eating themselves. Instead they smoke, arguably more detrimental to their health than eating carbohydrates. How do the men in the story participate in the women’s acquisition of vice? How can a desire for temperance justify trading one vice – smoking – for another – binge eating?

3. Ambiguous Endings

The devil’s in the details. Virtue counts for nothing if directed toward the wrong telos. Without charity we’re merely clanging bells.

Nearly thin, Louise imagines a marriage full of affection & tenderness. Richard demands that Louise quit smoking while she’s pregnant & she complies. After their baby is born, they fight constantly & she’s only at peace with the baby. Richard demands that she quit overeating & she refuses. What pattern is at play here?

What should Richard do? Does it matter whether or not Louise eats the candy bar? What should Louise do?